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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000490

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/17/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [EIND](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: DAYS OF (PRESIDENTIAL) FOLDERS AND ROSES

Classified By: Charge Richard Miles, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Special documents must be presented to the Turkmen President in a green velvet folder bearing his photo and with a gold national emblem on the cover. Documents must be inserted in this folder -- which costs \$77.46 -- in a particular way. Twenty-five long-stemmed white roses costing \$250 should also accompany these documents. Some locals think that this practice originated either with a minister or within the Presidential Apparat. From an American perspective, these onerous requirements seem over the top, but they are also an example of the emphasis that Turkmen place on form over content. Turkmenistan continues to seek out international recognition, and they see sometimes boroque protocol routines are a part of this. END SUMMARY.

#### PRESIDENTIAL FOLDERS

¶2. (SBU) According to a former Brisith Embassy employee, Special invitations to President Berdimuhamedov must be presented in a thick folder covered in green velvet, with a national emblem on the cover and a photo of the president on the inside left side. The folder costs 220 redenominated Turkmen manat (\$77.46) and can be bought at Orbi Printing House. Invitations that are on A4-size paper should lie on the right side, while A3-sized paper can be folded and inserted inside of the folder. Each folder should contain only one document. These folders are meant for special invitations, thank you letters, and other important documents only, and ministries and state agencies might have three or four occasions in a year during which they would want to send the president an invitation in this manner.

#### PRESIDENTIAL ROSES

¶3. (SBU) In addition, those presenting special papers and requests should include 25 long-stemmed white roses, which cost \$14 per stem (\$350 total) at either of two flower shops at Teke Bazaar. The purchaser should ask the vendor for the "white roses for the President." Post had heard anecdotes about the President's requirements to see white roses "everywhere he went" during his visit to Belgium and Germany.

WHAT IS IT ALL ABOUT?

¶4. (C) Our contact said in a meeting on April 16 that there are two theories about the origins of this practice.

-- One minister started the practice, and the other ministers didn't want to be different, so they joined in.

-- It originated with staff in the Presidential Apparat who thought that it would serve some protocol purpose.

FORM VERSUS CONTENT: DIFFERENT PRIORITIES THAN IN THE U.S.

¶5. (SBU) Our contact explained that Turkmen pay more attention to form than to content, and added that the U.S. is more pragmatic and pays more attention to content than form. He said that the marble architecture and fancy refurbishments of old Soviet-built buildings, and also careful interior design, and even the close attention people pay to their appearance in public are a reflection of the importance of form to content in Turkmen culture. He added that the receiver of an invitation or guest is also looking for these details, and suggested that Americans might find more success if they come to meetings bearing gifts, because this is expected. He explained that President Berdimuhamedov typically gives horses and carpets to heads of state because "he is as generous to his counterparts as his ministers are to him."

PRESSURE FOR PERFECTION IN EVERYDAY LIFE IS NOT ALWAYS APPRECIATED

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¶6. (C) He hypothesized that the pressure to put on elaborate parties for weddings and other important celebrations were so great that some people would probably be relieved by a ruling similar to one passed in Tajikistan that barred lavish wedding receptions. He also said that it takes "extreme rudeness" to get a host to stop continually offering food to guests, and explained that it would also take extreme rudeness on the part of the President to stop ministers and officials to discontinue these frivolous practices, which would not go over well.

¶7. (SBU) COMMENT: Turkmenistan continues to look for protocol rituals that equal and surpass those in other countries. It is important to all Turkmen officials that they feel respected and recognized in the international community, and because of the country's isolation for so many years, they tend to find creative ways of identifying protocol routines that will lend gravitas to official practices. END COMMENT.

MILES